

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:12	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:19	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Next up on the show: William Jackson Harper being interviewed by our friend Linda Holmes, who hosts NPR’s <i>Pop Culture Happy Hour</i> .
00:00:40	Sound Effect	Transition	Harper is an actor, and the odds are if you know his name, you’re a fan of <i>The Good Place</i> . Harper played Chidi, the sweet philosophy professor who could never make up his mind. Music swells and fades.
00:00:41	Clip	Clip	Chidi (<i>The Good Place</i>): It’d be easier to sort out the issue of dry erase versus paper if I could write down the pros and cons for each. But, of course, I would have to use one of them to write down the pros and cons for them, which is problematic.
00:00:53	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:00:54	Jesse	Host	The role jumpstarted his career, got him some award nominations—including an Emmy nod—then a couple of years ago, he got a part in the critically acclaimed horror movie <i>Midsommar</i> . He played Josh in that. These days, he’s got even more on his plate. He’s set to appear in the TV show <i>The Underground Railroad</i> , directed by Barry Jenkins, who made <i>Moonlight</i> and <i>If Beale Street Could Talk</i> . And he’s also got a leading part in a romcom. <i>We Broke Up</i> is about a couple who broke up. William plays Doug who, up until now, has been dating Lori—played by Aya Cash. Here’s the hitch, though: the two of them split up just days before Lori’s sister’s big destination wedding. So, does Lori show up alone and take the spotlight away from her sister or do they show up and pretend they’re still a couple? I mean, it’s just one more weekend, right? What could possibly go wrong?
00:01:59	Sound Effect	Transition	Anyway. Here’s a clip from the movie. Lori pulls Doug away from breakfast to confront him about making future vacation plans with her family even though—as the title suggests—they broke up. Music swells and fades.
00:02:00	Clip	Clip	Music: Soft, strumming music with airy whistling. Lori (<i>We Broke Up</i>): <i>[Angrily whispering.]</i> What are you doing over there? Doug: Well, I thought that was the plan. Pretend we’re still together?

Lori: You were literally making vacation plans with my grandparents.

Doug: I'm just trying to put on a good show.

Lori: This is my life. These are my people. You don't have to deal with them after this weekend. I do.

Doug: *[Beat.]* You're right. I'm sorry. Okay? Maybe we should... take a little space.

Lori: Yeah, maybe.

Doug: Mm. Avoid other people, keep a low profile.

Lori: Yeah. I think that would really help.
Music swells and fades.

00:02:48 Sound Effect Transition

00:02:49 Linda Holmes Host William Jackson Harper, welcome to *Bullseye!*

00:02:51 William Jackson Harper Guest Hey! Thanks for having me.

00:02:53 Linda Host So, that's a clip from *We Broke Up*, which is—you know, I watched it with the eye of a person who has seen a lot of romantic comedy. It is a romantic comedy, but the—you know, it's been referred to as subversive. I think that's fair. What did you like about this project when you first saw it?

00:03:11 William Guest Well, I just—you know... I know what it is to be in a long-term relationship and to have it sort of fall apart on you a little bit. And you know, it doesn't mean that the love is gone, and it doesn't mean that, you know, it's—that you now hate that person, and you just want them out of your lives forever. It's just like a—you know, you just grow in different ways and change and sometimes those things aren't compatible. And so, there's something in this script that just felt very real, and it felt more like the breakups that I had seen and sort of experienced personally. And so, yeah. I just—I, you know, was just really into seeing what that would feel like to play. You know?

00:03:53 Linda Host Yeah. I feel like I start all my conversations right now with similar themes, which are sort of—this is—this was pandemic filmed, right?

00:04:04 William Guest Uh, it was just before pandemic, actually. Yeah.

[Linda affirms.]

00:04:11 Linda Host Yeah, we were in February.
Where did you film this? 'Cause it takes place mostly at a kind of a—an old summer camp. Where is it—where was it filmed?

00:04:18 William Guest Yeah, we shot it in Malibu, actually. Most of it. In—like at this really very—it's a very fancy resort, but they also have like a—you know, these old sets out there from, you know, other movies that have shot out there. And actually, our set—a lot of our set was from *Wet, Hot American Summer*, that movie.

00:04:37 Linda Host Oh, woow! Okay.

00:04:38 William Guest Yeah! So, you know, like they have a bunch of random little pieces—you know—on the grounds. And so, we shot there.

00:04:45 Linda Host Oh, wow. I would not have guessed. It's very convincing as a—as an old summer camp. What has been—in terms of after the—kind of the pandemic started, what—how much work has been possible for you? How much have you been working?

00:05:02 William Guest You know, actually, I've been doing a fair amount of work. Nothing in person. I've been doing a lot of voiceover stuff, cartoon stuff, and then some—you know—home theatre sort of stuff. Like I've been, you know, doing like a lot of short Zoom plays and things like that. And so, it's—I've actually been able to stay pretty busy. You know? It's a—it pales in comparison to the real thing, obviously, but it's—you know, it's a way to try to stay sharp when you can. You know.

00:05:30 Linda Host Yeah. What else are you—what else have you—have you done with yourself? Have you been doing things that are new for you? Are you like a sourdough bread guy?

[William chuckles.]

00:05:42 William Guest Or a watch *Columbo* guy?
I've been trying to watch stuff on the Criterion Collection, and I've been getting stumped by some of the things that I've been trying to watch. I don't wanna like badmouth the things *[chuckling]* that I feel like I should like but I am just like completely flummoxed by, but like I've been watching a lot of TV. You know. Finally watched all of *The Sopranos*. I had never seen—I think I'd seen maybe... two episodes until pandemic started and then my girlfriend and I finished the whole thing.

00:06:14 Linda Host That's impressive.

00:06:15 William Guest It's—yeah. It's—I mean, it's a great show. I was like—you know, *[chuckles]* it's one of those things where you miss a cultural moment and you're like, "Oh! Now I get it!" You know?

[Linda agrees with a laugh.]

00:06:28 Linda Host It's like that's sort of what it was. Um, yeah. What else? *Call My Agent*—this French show that I just love.

00:06:30 William Guest People keep telling me that!
[Emphatically.] It's so great. It's so great. And it's really funny and heartfelt and it's not a daunting amount of episodes to watch. It's something that, you know, you can get through. But then like the other thing is actually I've been—I've been trying to learn piano just to have another skill. And I'm still trash at it. I've—I still sound like a fourth grader. But I—

00:06:53 Linda Host That's not bad. A lot of fourth graders are pretty good at piano.

00:06:56 William Guest Well, I sound like a fourth grader who started last week. You know?

[Linda laughs.]

Like it's just like really awful. But it's... but it's—but it's a lot of fun. It's like a new skill and it's like I've actually started to retain certain things and it's—like, I can read music now, which is something I never really had. And so, it's—you know—when I think about the time that we've had just sort of down and waiting, I always think

00:07:24 Linda Host like, “Oh, what did I do with it?” And I’m like, “Oh, well I did have—I did acquire at least one more skill.”
Yeah. I mean, I think between piano and finishing *The Sopranos*, that’s solid!

[William laughs.]

00:07:37 William Guest That’s a solid showing, productivity-wise, compared to a lot of people I think, during pandemic time.
Oh, I don’t know. I mean, I—it’s—it’s not a contest. This is [laughing]—it’s like a—it’s what it is.

[Linda laughs.]

00:07:49 Jesse Host And if you did nothing but chill out, that is—that is totally valid.
It’s *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. Our guest is actor William Jackson Harper.

00:07:55 Linda Host A lot of people—I think—know you best for playing Chidi Anagonye, on *The Good Place*—which you did for four—it’s four seasons, right?

00:08:04 William Guest Yeah, four seasons.

00:08:06 Linda Host I wanna ask you: Chidi is a philosophy—studies philosophy and ethics and things like that.

[William hums in agreement.]

00:08:33 William Guest The show had a lot of writing and consulting and conversation about philosophy and ethics. How did it affect you, being involved in a project for that long that was so kind of deeply involved in conversations about those kinds of things?
Uuuuh. You know, I didn’t realize how much it affected me until after it was done. I think that, you know, I... I think, beyond the—you know—ideas around philosophy and ethics that we discuss on the show, there is this general—there is just a very... the cast, the crew, Mike Schur—you know, like... everyone’s a good person. You know? [Laughs.] And it’s like—there is like this general sweetness on set at all times. Everyone’s treated with respect. You know? There is a very concerted effort to do the right thing. And, you know, in just the people that I’m around. And I think, when I’m—you know—around the likes of like Mike Schur and Ted Danson and Kristen Bell, these people that I’ve like seen for years be great in this industry and be great at their job, I guess I just assumed that... I assume they would be [censored]. [Laughing.] I just assumed that they would be like [stammering]—there would be something about them like, “Okay, well, you know, they’re—they’re people that are like really, you know—they’re successful and successful people can’t be kind and care about other folks that much. Right?”

I mean, like—I don’t know—it’s not—it’s not fair. It’s not real. It’s something I totally concocted in my own head. But you know, I—but just being around them and seeing how good they are, how much they think about what they owe to other people all the time and what is their duty given their status and where they are in their lives. It’s hard not to have that enter your everyday thinking. And so, you

know, I've had like a couple of moments. You know, some during the run of the show and some after, where it's just like—you know, I was like—I found myself thinking, "Wow. I can't—I can't morally justify this." I mean, even if—even though there's a payoff and I—you know, I feel that maybe a couple of years ago I'd have been like, "Well, I just gotta—you know, I just gotta hold my nose and do this thing." I felt like, "Well, you know, I gotta be able to live with myself after this is all done."

And I'd been working around these people and working on this show that talks about morality and ethics and principles and I would feel really terrible if I came away from that show having played the mouthpiece for all those ideas and not retained any of it. And so, yeah. It's—now is when I'm like starting to really notice that it's really infused itself into my thinking.

00:11:22 Linda Host

Yeah. You know, you said, "I sort of—" You said you sort of concocted this in your head, this idea that people had to be lousy human beings if they were really successful and I wonder is it that you concocted that in your head or is it that—'cause I always feel like where I get that from when I—when I kind of assume that about people—is both the repeated disappointment of learning unpleasant things about people whose work I admire and then seeing the idea that the natural, artistic temperament is abusive or unpleasant used as an excuse for people who are abusive or unpleasant. So, when you—it's almost a surprise when you're reminded, "Oh, there's nothing about being really super creative that requires you to be horrible to other people." It's just a thing that has been used as like a pass for people who are horrible.

00:12:14 William Guest

Yeah. I mean, the older I get I—the more I think, like, there's really no excuse to be a lousy person to other people. You know? There's—it's like you just don't have to do it. You kind of—you have a choice and—I mean, I understand that there are moments where people just sort of lose control. I totally get that. But. You know, I get angry a lot and I feel that like when I'm in those moments where I feel like I'm about to be really terrible, I pause. You know? Because it's just like I have to—I have to do—is this the person that I wanna be?

[Linda agrees.]

And is the person that I'm about to level this, you know, sort of vitriol at—do they really deserve the level of anger that I'm about to give them? Like probably not. And so, I just need to—you know, how much of that is just about other stuff and it's about me being frustrated? And I just don't feel like it's—I shouldn't make that other people's problem. And so, yeah. That's the thing of like working with—you know, these TV greats, these people that I admire so much, these—you know, sort of artistic giants in our field. Like, I—when I'm working with them and they're super sweet and super generous and kind and nerdy about what we're trying to make and excited it's like, "Oh, okay. This is—that doesn't have to be the norm." And I'm willing to be that that's not the norm. But you know, I guess it's—I've—yeah, like you, I've seen—I've seen the other part, too. I've seen the other thing happen.

And so, it's—I'd like to—I'd like to kind of move forward with a more open heart. You know? And just be like, "You know what? People are gonna be decent to you if you—if you really give them a shot." And so, you know, I don't know. I'm still learning that, but I'm working towards it.

00:14:04 Linda Host Yeah. You know, I didn't know until I started reading up on your work that you had done theatre with actually two women that I've interviewed for this very show. You worked with Cristin Milioti in *After the Blast*. I talked to her around *Palm Springs*, which was a really fun conversation. And Carrie Coon, who you worked with in *Placebo*. Yeah?

[William confirms.]

So, I'm—what I'm curious about is how has the sort of—the interruption—you know, those are both people that I talked to extensively about kind of the significance and importance of theatre and the theatre community. How has kind of the interruption of live theatre hit you, personally?

00:14:48 William Guest Well, you know, I—it's been a few years since I've done a play.

[Linda affirms.]

That used to be my main thing, was—you know—going from play to play to play. So, I think for me at this point it's really sort of like I'm looking at my friends who that's how they make their living is going from play to play to play and I'm like, "Wow, this is a year of you not getting to do your job." And you know, it's—I don't know. I guess concern is like the biggest thing. And, you know, frustration that we kind of couldn't get it together enough to kind of come out of this faster and all that stuff. But you know, it's—yeah, it's a lot of—a lot of concern on my end. But I also just—I also just miss going to the theatre a lot. You know? It's just like this thing where you're in a room and we're all together experiencing these people go through something in real-time. And it's like what you see what you get and there's something about that that is—it's really thrilling to me, more so than almost anything else. Which is why I did it for so long.

And so, I really hope that theatre can come back sooner rather than later. I know people are—have said things like, "Aw, theatre's dead, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And I don't believe that, obviously. But I do wonder if this does sort of like—you know, take a swipe at theatre when it's on the ropes. You know? *[Chuckles.]* And that I'm a little worried about. Um. But yeah. It's... I don't know. I think that's the thing that—I just feel concerned for my friends who are doing a lot of plays.

00:16:31 Jesse Host We'll finish up with William Jackson Harper after the break. Now that he's getting more work as an actor, he's able to turn down some roles. Harper will tell us why it's such a big relief to be able to say no once in a while. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:16:49 Music Transition Laid back music.

00:16:50 Jesse Promo This message comes from NPR sponsor Odoo.

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00:17:26 Promo Clip

[*Music fades out.*]

Music: Upbeat, thumpy music.

Speaker 1: A few years ago, a website popped up in Stockton, California and conspiracy theories started ramping way up.

Speaker 2: It's being funded by the conservative movement underneath the table.

Speaker 3: And I was like, "Oh my gosh, you guys—people really believe this."

Speaker 1: What happens when the local new outlet isn't factchecking conspiracy theories? Maybe encouraging them? Listen now, from NRP's *Invisibilia* podcast.

00:17:51 Jesse Host

[*Music ends.*]

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, we are talking with William Jackson Harper. You've seen him in the acclaimed sitcom *The Good Place*, where he played Chidi. He's also been in movies like *Midsommar* and in TV shows like *High Maintenance*. Right now, you can see him in *We Broke Up*: a romantic comedy in which he stars alongside Aya Cash. It's out now in select theaters and on demand.

00:18:23 Linda Host

Conducting the interview is William Jackson Harper and *Good Place* superfan, Linda Holmes.

What kinds of things do you find are kind of challenging or kind of scary to think about doing right now?

00:18:31 William Guest

Uuuh... well, like large—like really larger than life characters on camera is tough. Just because it doesn't take a whole lot to be big on camera, but it's also really easy to disappear on camera. There's a couple of actors that I watch that—and I mean, like actually Kristen Bell is one of them—who just knows how to make things feel full and up, but also subtle. And I think that like one of the things that I've run into sometimes is like when I tried to go big with something, it just—it's too much! [*Laughs.*] And I—you know, and I have to find a way to calibrate that. Onstage, it's a little bit easier just because it's like you've gotta fill a house and you just go for it and it's usually fine.

[*Linda affirms.*]

But there's a—there's a subtle calibration on camera that's a lot—a lot tougher. But like that's something that really frightens me. Or—

you know, someone with like a serious—like a very distinct physical trait. Like, that’s something that I’m like—like, “Huh. How do I keep that consistent? How do I like use it? How do I—” You know. It’s just like little things like that. Just like—it’s really more like—sort of like the window-dressing. It’s like when it’s—you know, the truth of the character is gonna be the truth of the character, but when you have something that you need to do in order for that character to actually be able to be fully rendered as what the writer wanted—like, that sort of thing frightens me, ‘cause I’ve never had to do anything that’s like physically or vocally way out of my wheelhouse. You know?

00:20:08 Linda Host

Yeah. I will say one thing that we haven’t talked about yet is *Midsommar* and that is probably the biggest thing that you have done that I have not seen, because I have refused to see it because I am too scared.

[William chuckles.]

It’s the same thing with Toni Collette in *Hereditary*. I know it’s very good. Have not seen it. Too scared. Can’t do it.

[William sighs in commiseration.]

Were you a horror—were you a kind of a horror creepo movie guy before you were in *Midsommar*?

00:20:34 William Guest

I—yeah? Yeah. I mean, like I don’t—I don’t watch horror movies like once a week or anything like that, but I do love a type of horror film. Like I like—like I like a cult film. I like a supernatural film. Like the slasher thing is not really my jam, just because it’s like—I—for me, I just feel like, “Okay, so we’re wading through all the people that are gonna die until there’s one person left.” And it’s like—so, it’s like—you know, you kind of know where you’re headed, and I get—I get bored. But then like the supernatural stuff, that terrifies me. Because you can’t fight it. You know? You can’t have a fistfight with a ghost. You just gotta *[chuckles]* deal with it.

00:21:16 Linda Host

[Laughs softly.] So, what kind do you—what kind do you like?

00:21:18 William Guest

Well... well, I love *The Exorcist*. *Rosemary’s Baby* I think is fantastic. Let’s see. I liked *The Ring* a lot. That came out when I was—I don’t know, I can’t remember when it came out, but I was younger.

00:21:33 Linda Host

That movie’s so scary. It was scary.

00:21:34 William Guest

I loved it. Yeah, I loved it. I—that is—that was 100% my jam. I was sooo excited.

00:21:44 Linda Host

It’s so—it’s such an upsetting movie. Oh, it’s so upsetting though. I thought about it. I saw that one and then after it I just kept thinking about it. And I kept thinking about that girl and it was so... just *[whispering]* disturbing. It was very disturbing.

00:21:58 William Guest

Well, yeah. It’s unsettling. It’s like the thing where it’s like—you know, something’s frightening but you’re not 100% sure why it’s frightening. And then it gets legit real scary. It’s like I love when that happens. And it’s—and so, yeah. I love that sort of thing. I really liked *The Conjuring* movies quite a bit. I think that those are fun. So, it’s—yeah, stuff like that is my—that is—I scare the mess out of myself watching those and I love it.

00:22:29 Linda Host
00:22:33 William Guest

What is coming up next? You're in *Underground Railroad*, yeah? Yeah. Yeah. You know, you were talking earlier about stuff that kind of scares me—like, that was a project that I was like really scared of. You know. Just because—I mean, A) the subject matter's like intensely triggering for me and it's the kind of stuff that makes me angry and it's hard to go to some of those places. And—but also, you know, just working with Barry Jenkins, like that's intimidating because I just have all the respect in the world for him and I think he's amazing. And also, like—you know, this—like, the cast was—when I'd heard who else was in it, I was just like, "Aww man, everyone's real good. Everyone's real good. Oh lord. Am I ready? Can I handle this? I don't know. I don't know."

[Linda chuckles and affirms.]

But yeah. I'm really excited for people to experience this piece and to have some conversations and to have some questions for themselves and for people that they're watching with and for their community afterwards.

[Linda agrees.]

00:23:43 Linda Host

'Cause I think it's—I think it's really harrowing and special and hopefully it makes people mad. And—'cause I mean it definitely did that for me.

Yeah. You know, I wanna ask you—without sort of requiring you to kind of rehash the entire thing, I did wanna ask you a little bit about last fall, a story that you told about a screening of *Malcolm X* that you were scheduled to host for military. Right? A military screening of *Malcolm X*.

[William confirms.]

00:24:11 William Guest

Can you sort of sketch out the—like I said, without sort of requiring you to rehash the whole thing—can you kind of sketch out what that story was?

Yeah. So, basically, I work with this charity called Arts in the Armed Forces, which is just—you know, it's a charity that introduces arts programming to, you know, the various military academies. And we were doing this movie night and they asked me for three movies that I would be interested in watching and having a little talkback with the—with the—some of the cadets and stuff. And I—the—I think the three movies I listed were *Citizen Kane*, *American Honey*, and *Malcolm X*. And *Malcolm X* was the one that was picked. And I was like, "Okay, great!"

And then I get an email from my agent saying like, "A couple of the academies might pull out just because of—you know, this executive order." And I forget the actual name of it, but it's like combating race and sexist stereotyping, something like that. I'm paraphrasing it, but, "They might pull out just in case they run afoul of that executive order."

And I was like, “Oh! That’s... okay? That’s really strange.” And in the end, actually, three of the four academies that were going to participate wound up participating. You know, initially two academies dropped out and then one came back in. And so, three of the four academies did participate, and we had a great discussion and we just—you know, that was—that was basically it. But I just felt like, “Huh. This is like—this is odd.” Because I felt like... I felt like I had to say something just because if this executive order could be interpreted in that way, where a movie like *Malcolm X* couldn’t be shown to people? I was like, “We should rethink that. We should think about that.”

And so, yeah. That sort of led to me, you know, posting my little like rant on Twitter just ‘cause I was like, “I just need to say something about it, just ‘cause it feels weird to not mark this.” I don’t know. I just feel like we needed to know that that’s the sort of chilling effect that can—that this executive order can have. And also, I mean like I should say that like the executive order doesn’t say—does not say, “Cadets cannot watch *Malcolm X*.” So, it was like that’s not in there. You know? It’s just the interpretation of certain people could sort of start to push certain things out of—it could—it could lead to people censoring certain things that maybe don’t need to be censored.

And I just was like, “We should be—we should keep an eye on that.” You know?

00:26:54 Linda Host

Yeah. Do you—do you have any hesitation when you—when you sort of get involved in something like that that is—that is likely to kind of draw the attention of people who are very invested in kind of political back and forth even though that’s not what you’re trying to do? Are you conflicted about it or is it just obvious that that has to be done? When you sort of decide to speak publicly about something like that.

00:27:21 William Guest

I mean, of course I’m conflicted about it just because—you know, I feel like I’m not the most qualified person to be talking about things all the time. You know? Like, I think that this—with this particular case, it was just—I just told the story exactly as it happened. You know? Like, I wasn’t trying to put too much of a spin on anything and I wasn’t saying like, “This is what they said, and nobody can—!” Like, nothing sensational. Like I said, three of the four academies actually participated. And so, it’s like I don’t like wading too much into political waters all the time just because I find myself out of my depth. I’m not a political thinker. I’m just a citizen who has opinions. And sometimes because of my little piece of a platform, it can come off as if I’m like some kind of authority on something and it’s just like—it’s just me voicing my opinion on something. And so, I try to be careful about that just because it’s—you know. Like, I don’t wanna get too far out of my depth. I really—and I also I really have zero interest in engaging in political debate on Twitter and Instagram. I just—

[Linda agrees.]

You’re never gonna—nuance is completely lost and it’s really more about how do you own someone, hurt someone’s feelings and end

the argument and get retweeted by—with someone saying, “Ooooh! Totally taken down.” You know? Like that’s what the arguments are. It never—nothing is ever resolved. People just sort of dig in more. And so, I’m—I have zero interest in engaging in those debates. And so, when I do wade out and say something, it’s like—it’s kind of important to me or it’s just—it’s legit personal. And it’s more about my experience, less about what I think other people should believe.

[Linda affirms.]

00:29:16	Linda	Host	You know? And so, it’s like, “Take what you want from it and this is my experience. This is how I feel.” Yeah. I do wanna ask you—we talked a little bit about kind of the... your thinking around making sure that the decisions that you’re making are decisions that you can live with and feel good about. Has that changed anything about the kinds of roles that you say yes or no to? Are there things that you say no to because it’s just not the—not where you wanna be in terms of the kind of work that you wanna do?
00:29:40	William	Guest	Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. And as I’ve gotten older, you know, I—and a little bit more stable, you know, financially, I’ve been able—it’s—that’s a luxury, to be able to just say yes or no. You know? Like, that’s a privilege.

[Linda agrees.]

And—you know? It’s like—like the—there are people out there that are really struggling and they’re making principled decisions before they have like real stability yet. And like that’s—like, that’s the thing to admire. You know? Like you know, me, I’m like—I would do anything that anyone would ask for a long time just ‘cause I was like, “I need to—I need to work. I gotta pay the rent.” And I don’t begrudge anyone making that kind of decision. But you know, like I think that now—having, you know—knowing that rent is paid for a little bit and you know, I don’t have to jump immediately, as soon as someone asks me to a project. I’m like, “Okay, well let me—let me be choosy in certain respects.” Like you know, if something politically—if there’s something politically being said that I’m not 100% sure I’m comfortable with, I feel okay saying, you know, “I don’t think I wanna—I don’t think I wanna do that.”

And that’s nice. It’s a privileged position, though, to be in. And I realize that. And so, like my hat’s off to the people that make those decisions right off the—right off the bat, ‘cause that was not me for the longest time.

00:31:08	Linda	Host	Yeah. I don’t think it’s—I don’t think it’s anybody—it’s sort of depressing that it’s—that the freedom to kind of follow your own ethical mind is something that comes with a certain amount of, you know, money in the bank. But I think it’s unavoidable and true for—true for most people.
00:31:24	William	Guest	Yeah! And I mean, it sucks. It’s hard, you know? Because it’s—you know, like I really do wish that—you know, there’s definitely some things that I’ve done where I’m like, “Uh, I don’t know if I—I don’t know if—hmm. I don’t know if that was the right kind of project.” You

know? And it's like—and none of it's like really big stuff, but it's like—you know, there's definitely been moments where I'm like, "Did I—I don't know. I don't know if that's the kind of thing I should've been doing." But I did it just because I needed the experience. I needed—you know, or a paycheck. Or I just wanted to perform and just see what I could do. And now, I'm like—you know, I—there's only so many years on this earth that we all get and I wanna make sure that I'm doing stuff that—you know, when it's all sort of wrapped up I'm like—you know? I felt good about that decision. I felt good in doing that. And that's it. So. Yeah.

00:32:21	Linda	Host	Yeah. It's nice to have choices about whether or not to do like the police procedural circuit and stuff like that. <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
00:32:27	William	Guest	Yeah. Yeah. Totally.
00:32:29	Linda	Host	William Jackson Harper, thank you so much for talking to me. This was really fun.
00:32:33	William	Guest	Yeah. Thanks for—thanks for having me. This was great.
00:32:36	Jesse	Host	William Jackson Harper. His newest movie, <i>We Broke Up</i> , is playing now in select theaters and on demand. Keep an eye out next month for his role in Barry Jenkin's TV series, <i>The Underground Railroad</i> . That will be on Prime video.

Harper was interviewed by our friend and correspondent, Linda Holmes. Linda is one of the hosts of the great NPR show *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, which you can listen to wherever you get your podcasts. She's also the author of several books, including the wonderful novel *Evvie Drake Starts Over*.

00:33:09	Music	Transition	Fun, peppy music.
00:33:11	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is created out of the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—although, big news, friends! This little bit of narration is the first <i>Bullseye</i> that I have recorded in our actual recording studio in whatever it's been. A year? Year and a half? My stomach is full of cabeza tacos, con aguacate, no cebollas. I can't eat onions, because it gives me a headaaaaache.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio and Jordan Kauwling are our associate producers. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Production fellows at Maximum Fun are Richard Robey and Valerie Moffat. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it with us.

You can also keep up with the show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post all of our interviews there. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:34:21	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
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[Music fades out.]